

FASTS AS ORDAINED BEFORE YOU



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Non - religious advanced people of high - tech cultures have also found this institution useful for dietary and political purposes.

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The author suggests that instead of making this world a hot - bed of confrontation, we need to realize that the Source of Guidance for Jews, Christians and Muslims has been the same : the more we deviate from the Source, the more problems we would have at our hands.

Further, with his deep knowledge on **fasting** the author describe in detail the excellent qualities of **fasting** and the success achieved and enjoyed by the religious people, on account of it.

*'Oh you who believe, **fasting** is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for people before you so that you may become God-fearing !'*

ISBN: 967 - 9963 - 62 - 4

(Quran 2 : 183)

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THE TRADITION OF FASTS ACCORDING TO THE
JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM SCRIPTURES)

MUHAMMAD UMAR CHAND



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Published by :
A.S. NOORDEEN

@ Muhammad Umar Chand

First Published 1413AH/1992AD

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ISBN : 967-9963-62-4

PUBLISHED BY:
A.S. NOORDEEN
P.O Box: 10066
50704 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 4236003

PRE PRESS BY:
Syarikat R&S
Typeface: 11/13 points Trump Medieval

PRINTED BY:
Percetakan Zafar Sdn. Bhd.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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INTRODUCTION



There have been rarely any people on earth in known history, who have not had 'fasting' in one form or another in their religious rites. All societies, from the most primitive to the most advanced, have found fasting useful for one reason or another. Ancient religions of American Indian tribes and Tungus of Siberia have practiced fasting during their quest for visions from their deities. Jains, Buddhists, and Hindus have practiced fasting for their spiritual growth, salvation or atonement. The People of the Book – Jews, Christians, and Muslims – have emphasized fasting during certain periods seeking atonement or penance, and expressing feelings of mourning or festivity. Non-religious 'advanced' people of high-tech cultures have also found this institution useful for dietary and political purposes.

Oh you who believe, Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for people before you So that you may become God-fearing.

(Quran 2: 183)

This verse introducing Fast reminds Muslims that they are not the only people ordained with the commandment of fasting; that other people before this Ummah were required to fast for various reasons; that there were people among the earlier human beings who fasted rigorously; and that it is not an extra burden put exclusively on the shoulders of Muslims. It also reminds Muslims that they have to strive and excel the people of previous Books in fasting as in other matters of piety:

For everyone there is a goal (direction) to which he turns; so strive to excel (against one another) in virtuous deeds..

(Quran: 2:148.)

As Muslims are a community that fasts openly, in such multitudes, for such long periods of time in one go, and with such external and internal enthusiasm and fervour, they, in a way, create a mixed feeling of curiosity and fear in the hearts of the non-fasting communities living with them as neighbours. Sometimes, this fear might exact an illuminating response.

One natural response from those Jews and Christians who feel threatened by this practice of Muslims would be to try to outdo others in the good game of fasting by going back to this institution which their forefathers used to hold up as a means of getting nearer to God. Instead, in most cases, they prefer to stay out of this 'exotic' practice; some would go even as far as to find some-

thing derisive and sneering to say about the institution of fasting, calling the perpetrators of it funny, weird, and crazy.

Non-religious modern populace, which has little use for God and His ways, seizes upon some pseudo-scientific grounds for rationalising abandonment of fasting: they would claim fasting to be physically and psychologically harmful for individuals and destructive for societies adhering to this institution; western political gurus would leave no chance of condemning this institution fearing it to be promoting something they see as 'Islamic Fundamentalism', a form of religious stubbornness which Westerners perceive to be dangerous for their 'way of life'.

Nevertheless, undaunted by contemporaneous criticism and remonstrance, Muslims go on fasting, praise be to God, Alhamdulillah, claiming that what they have been practicing for the last fourteen hundred years is nothing new in the annals of religious history; that they are only following the commandments of God brought by all the Biblical Prophets respected and honoured by Jews, Christians as well as Muslims; that earlier 'People of the Book' had similar laws of fasting which they have conveniently given up.

Responding to the criticism on pseudo-scientific grounds, Muslims say (in words of Allah):

'These are their conjectures; say: "Bring forth your evidence if you are the truth-tellers."

(Quran 2:111)

The evidence Muslims bring forth in support of the efficacy and strength of the fasting institution is the simple fact that during the last fourteen hundred years of their lives, innumerable generations of Muslims have very rigorously fasted away more than one-twelfth part of their adult lives; however, contrary to all Western expectations, fears and hopes, Muslims have remained a mentally and physically healthy people, showing no signs of physical and mental retardation due to fasting any more than non-fasting people have shown in their societies.

Above all, Muslims claim that they stand far taller in moral stature in terms of piety and sobriety than non-fasting communities – this institution of Fasting being one of the contributing factors. Some well-intending Westerners admit that modern Jews and Christians would do far better if they would adhere to the ways of their Prophets. Instead of abandoning the institution of fasting, they might wish to cherish it as a practice followed by their biblical Prophets.

As today's vast world has already shrunk into a small universal village, we need to find out those common denominators which can bring the warring factions of the west and the east closer in understanding. Instead of making this world a hotbed of confrontation, we need to realize that the Source of Guidance for Jews, Christians and Muslims has been the same: the more we deviate from the Source, the more problems we would have at our hands.

Muslim tradition tells us that all Prophets – Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all – have had this institution of Fasting. Reviewing the Old and the New Testaments, we find Moses, peace be upon him, issuing an 'statute for ever' about fasting. We find Prophets Samuel, David, Ezra, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Joel, Jonah, and Zechariah, peace be upon them all, all fasting for community as well as personal needs. We find Jesus, peace be upon him, and his apostles, Paul and Barnabas and other 'prophets and followers' fasting.

Finding themselves in such a wonderful company of the Prophets of the past, Muslims can only feel elated for what they have done throughout the last fourteen hundred years. This strong link between Jews, Christians, and Muslims needs to be exploited for mutual peace and understanding.

Fast provides Muslims with an opportunity to pray to God to help them live on the straight path obeying Him and His Messengers of the Past – Abraham, Isaac, Yaqoob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, peace be upon them all. Thus this institution of Fasting reminds Muslims of the promise of Allah:

And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, then these shall be in the company of those whom Allah has blessed from among the prophets, the truthful saints, the martyrs, and the right-

teous. And how excellent are they as a company! That is the grace from Allah; and Allah suffices as Knower.

(Quran 4:69-70)

MUHAMMAD UMAR CHAND

Brunei Darussalam

Ramadhan 21, 1412 AH

March 26, 1992 AD

FASTS AS ORDAINED TO THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

We find that the Prophets in the Old and the New Testaments fasted for atonement, for averting prophesied and perceived disasters, for expiation of their deeds, seeking help of God in times of fear and wars.

01. Fasts Ordained to Moses for Atonement

After the incident of the golden calf, Moses, peace be upon him, went to God seeking atonement for his people. There God made a covenant with him, rewriting the commandments on two tablets of stone instead of the tablets Moses had broken earlier out of anger. Moses

“was there for forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.”

(Exodus:34:28.)

Neither eating bread nor drinking water for forty days and nights by Moses, peace be upon him, was the beginning of the fasts that later on became

a part of the 'statute for ever,' as detailed in the *Book of Leviticus*. The purpose of this fast was atonement, cleansing from all sins, and the statute made it compulsory for the people not to work on this day.

"And it shall be a statute to you for ever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall fast, and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before your Lord. It is a Sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall fast; it is a statute for ever."

(Leviticus: 16:29-31)

02. Prophet Samuel's Fasts seeking Victory

The Jews were defeated at Ebenezer by Philistines (ancestors of modern Palestinians) during the days of Eli, the Prophet, peace be upon him. When they brought the holy ark [the Sakeenah] seeking divine help, that too was ceased by Philistines and carried away. The ark had to be returned to Israelites as it appeared to be an ominous source of menacing hardship for Philistines.

In the mean time, Samuel (Shmu'el), the son of Elkanah (of Ephraim and Hannah) a seer, priest, judge, prophet, and military leader, referred to in Quran as 'their Prophet' (in Surah Al-Baqarah 246-

248), gathered his people, *fasted*, did penitence, asking God for his help [Arabic 'nashr', Hebrew 'nezzer'].

"So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, whole day, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord."

(The First Book of Samuel, 7: 6.)

In consequence of their fasts and prayers, Bani Israel won the battle against the Philistines.

It may sound strange to outsiders, but Muslims, including Palestinians, who read the Quran, rejoice at this victory of the Prophet of God, Samuel, peace be upon him, against Palestinians, who were supposed to have been pagans then (as they are known to have worshipped gods other than or in addition to One God.)

As described in the Quran, this battle was not a matter of one nationalistic group fighting against another nationalistic group. As they look at it today it was not a matter of Jews (sons of Israel) fighting against Palestinians; it was a choice between the side of believers in one God and His worshippers on the one hand, and non-believers in One God or associators, on the other. Muslims reading these stories of Bani Israel and Philistines have to be on the side of God and His Prophets – irrespective of race, cast, and colour. Whoever is on God's side has got to be their champion.

Abu Jahal and Abu Lahab were not only Arabs, they were Quraishites and close relatives of the

Prophet, peace be upon him; but they are looked upon as enemies of God. Today no Palestinian is a pagan, Alhamdulillah. They are all 'People of the Book': they are Jewish Palestinians, Christian Palestinians, and Muslim Palestinians. All of these believing 'People of the Book' are being oppressed by a non-believing people: foreign Israelite Zionists who have nothing to do with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or Moses. The present racist aggression, animosity and oppression perpetuated by the Zionists is by definition anti-faith and paganistic. The earlier Jews had prophets among them and they were required to follow the law of God; their opponents were pagans. Now the roles have been reversed.

Thus Prophets Samuel, David, and Solomon, peace be upon them all, were all heroes for all Muslims as well as Christians and Jews – including all Palestinians themselves – the Jewish Palestinians, the Christian Palestinians, and Muslim Palestinians.

Goliath's defeat is perceived as the defeat of evil at the hands of good, David, peace be upon him, not as the Palestinian defeat at the hands of Bani Israel.

Modern Palestinian leaders, who are believers in God and all His Prophets, have been taught by God to celebrate David's victory over Goliath, without a tinge of nationalistic feelings. Their contemporary leaders, in their times of turmoil and hardship, are known to have sought grace and help of God in words of Prophets Samuel and David,

peace be upon them:

How often has a small group prevailed against a large group. and indeed God is with the steadfast.

(Quran 2:249)

God has taught Muslims to pray to Him in the words of Prophet Samuel, peace be upon him, as he prayed in his moments of hardship. Prophet Samuel's prayer is the oft-recited prayer in the Muslim world:

And when they went into the battle-field against Goliath and his hosts
They said:

**'Oh our Lord, bestow upon us endurance,
make our foothold firm, and give us help
against the disbelieving folks.**

(Quran 2:250)

This battle of believers against non-believers was won with the grace of God due to prayers and fasting.

03. People Fast Mourning Saul's Death

Prophet Samuel, peace be upon him, established first monarchy in the 11th century B.C. in the Sons of Israel, making Saul [Arabic, 'Taloot'] king after their victory over the Philistines at Ebenezer.

Their Prophet said to them Indeed, Allah has raised up Saul (Taloot) to be king..

(Quran 2:247..)

People objected to this selection which they considered to be arbitrary, without having taken into consideration the 'wealth' or riches of the wealthy.

They said,

"How can he have kingdom over us when we are more deserving of the kingdom than he is, since he has not been provided with any wealth.

(Quran2:247)

The prophet of God justified Taloot's selection for a king on the bases of his meritorious 'knowledge' and 'physique'.

He said,

"Allah has chosen him above you, and He has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. Allah bestows His sovereignty on whom He will; Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing!"

(Quran 2:247)

(This **knowledge**, which was also one of the strong personality traits of Joseph, peace be upon him, in addition to his capability of saving and protecting the treasures of the earth [*hafeedhun 'aleem*] and his being trustworthy [*makeenun*

Ameen (Quran 12:54-55)], would be for Saul the knowledge of the Scriptures and Laws and his ability to apply it in practical affairs; and his **physical strength and fortitude** would enable him to face his adversaries in the anticipated wars.)

And their Prophet (Samuel) said to them: Indeed the sign of his kingdom is that there shall come to you the ark in which there is peace for you from your Lord, and a remnant of that which was left behind by the house of Moosa (Moses) and the house of Haroon (Aaron); the angels bearing it;

Indeed in this is there a sign for you if you are of the believers.

(Quran 2:248)

It was also during Saul's days that David (Dawood, peace be upon him) killed Jalooth, the leader of the Palestinianians.

And they routed them with Allah's help; And David slew Goliath.

(Quran 2:251)

Later on, as we learn from the Old Testament, Saul was rejected as king by Samuel the Prophet for the former's arrogating to himself the right of sacrifice and for failing to carry out the law of the ban.

(All these justifications are retrospective in nature – showing how personal and nationalistic tendencies in Jewish people allowed them to distort the Law of God: Quran is to correct these personal whimsical laws based on selfish motives: Islam allows all believers to perform all religious rituals without allowing to distinguish between sons of Aaron, Moses, or a commoner. A permitted activity allowed to be performed by one Muslim can be performed by any other Muslim who is personally capable of performing it. A Muslim would find it hard to believe God would be angry with Saul because he performed something that was permitted by law.)

Saul is also said to have grown jealous of David because of the young hero's popularity. Towards the end of Saul's days David is reported to have gone in hiding to save himself from his former mentor's wrath.

Saul is reported in the *Old Testament* to have eventually killed himself. (Another Jewish slander against one chosen by God!) This is reported to have happened at Mount Gilboa after Saul's sons (including Jonathan) were killed in a fierce battle and when he was afraid the Philistines were about to seize him. His body was apparently taken away by his enemies to be exhibited on the wall of Bethshan.

The people of Jabesh-gilead came and took away the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall. They are reported to have burned the bodies and buried the bones and **fasted seven days** in the way

of mourning. (I Samuel 31:13, I Chronicles 10: 12)

04. David's Fast Mourning Saul's Death

When the news of Saul's death reached him in his hiding, Prophet David (Dawood), peace be upon him, also observed a fast of mourning as Saul was his mentor and father-in-law, and Jonathan, his best friend.

David took hold of his clothes, and rent them; and so did all the men who were with him; and they mourned and wept and *fasted* until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the House of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

(II Samuel 1.11-12.)

05. David Fasts Seeking His Child's Life

David, peace be upon him, also fasted when his child by Bathsheba, Uriah's (ex-) wife, became sick.

David therefore besought God for the child; and David *fasted*, and went in and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground; but he would not; nor did he eat food with them. ..

On the seventh day the child died..

Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped; he then went to his house; and when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate.

Servants found David's behaviour rather puzzling:

Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food."

David, peace be upon him, had a natural explanation for them:

He said,
"While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live.

But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

(II Samuel 12:16-23)

Although no correlation seems to have been

claimed by the author of the *Book of Samuel* between David's fasting and Bathsheba's conceiving her son Solomon soon after, for a Muslim reader that relationship is abundantly clear without saying it in so many words, as he knows that a sincere prayer never fails, particularly that of a Prophet.

For Muslims the general principle has been expressed in the story of Moses and the Friend of God: God takes away from His servant what may turn out to be evil for him, He gives him in turn what is good for him:

And as for the lad, his parents were believers; So then we feared that he might impose upon them exorbitance and infidelity; So we intended that their Lord should change him for them for one better in purity and closer in affection.

(Quran: 17: 80-81)

Prayers and fasts of David did not go in vain. God bestowed upon him a child who was going to be one of the four best or approved Kings according to the Islamic tradition. (The other three being David himself, Dhul-Qarnain, and the Pharaoh of Joseph.)

Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon.

(II Samuel 12: 24-25)

06. David's Fasts Are Ridiculed

Prophet David (Dawood), peace be upon him, sang praises of Allah in the most beautiful voice and in the most touching words.

And assuredly We gave David grace (fadla) from Us, (saying) Oh ye mountains, repeat Our praise with him, and you too, oh birds...

(Quran 34:10)

'And remember Our bondman David, a man with hands; Indeed, he was (one who would) oft-return unto Us Indeed We subdued mountains to sing praise with him at night and at sunrise. And the birds assembled (to sing with him), And all were turning unto Him. We made his kingdom strong; and gave him wisdom and decisive speech.

(Quran 38:17-20)

Two persons are reported to have come to David, peace be upon him, seeking his judgement regarding ewes:

'This my brother has one hundred ewes', said one of the two, 'and I have only one. But he wants even the one that I have, and he has won the argument against me.'

David, peace be upon him, said: He has wronged you by demanding your ewe; and indeed many partners oppress one another, except those

who believe and do good deeds; but they are few...As he was speaking, David realised he was condemning none other than himself as the word of his censure applied to him as well as to any other oppressor:

...And David realized We had tried him, and he sought forgiveness of his Lord, and he bowed himself and prostrated and repented.

So We forgave him that; and indeed he had access to Our Presence, and a happy retreat.

(Quran: 38:24-25)

This story is narrated in the Old Testament in II Samuel Chapter 12, with slight twists here and there, culminating in the death of Bathsheba's first child – as narrated above.

This David sang praises of God in his Psalms in the book Jews and Muslims know as *Zaboor* in Hebrew as well as Arabic. In one of his most beautiful songs of praises and penitence, David, peace be upon him, seeks God's help against his own people's 'attacks of lies' where even as sincere a form of worship as *fast* becomes a means of throwing insults on the person of the prophet:

Save me O God, for the waters have come up to my neck... I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold.. More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me..

When I humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them, I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me.

But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Lord. At an acceptable time, O God, In the abundance of thy steadfast love answer me.

With thy faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire..

(Psalm: 69: 1-14)

Muslims would love to borrow these words from this psalm of David, peace be upon him, to pray to God in their times of sorrow and hardship.

07. Jezebel's Fasts For An Evil Purpose

Fast has been used by some persons in the Biblical times for their own personal nefarious purposes, and for what a modern reader would recognise as politically motivated 'hunger strike'. This kind of 'fast' has no religious sanctity, nor is it acceptable to God.

Ahab, the King of Samaria, wanted to buy the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite who refused to sell it, saying:

" God forbid that I should give you the

inheritance of my fathers."

Ahab was greatly distressed by Naboth's refusal. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, couldn't see her husband in such distress. She sent letters to the elders and the nobles in Ahab's name and under his seal asking them

'to proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people; and set two base fellows opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him saying, "You have cursed God and the king." Then take him out and stone him to death.'

(I Kings 21: 1-14)

That is exactly what the 'elders and nobles' did, not a very noble thing to do. Using fast for a political purpose, they forced the authorities of the day to take action on something falsely projected to be true. When Naboth was stoned to death, Jezebel asked Ahab to immediately take possession of the vineyard. Ahab allowed himself to be led by his wife for an evil purpose. However such foul deeds do not go unpunished. Elijah, the Prophet, peace be upon him, brought Lord's message for the destruction of Ahab's house, including Jezebel:

In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood... Dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel... Any one belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall

eat; and anyone who dies in the open country the birds of the air shall eat."

(1 Kings 21: 20-24)

As Israelites acted exorbitantly in their past, they are acting exorbitantly even today, occupying weaker people's lands and finding authoritative ways of not only disposing them but exterminating them. As they were not worried about God's revenge upon them in the past; similarly they are not troubled about God's revenge upon them even today! Such people who exploit religious sensibilities of people for their own personal gains are dangerous for any society.

08. Ahab's Fast of Penitence

In spite of all his human weaknesses, Ahab was not as bad as his wife; and Israelites owed him a great deal for having subdued Ben-haddad, the Syrian king. Besides, he was a God-fearing person of a sort. When the prophet Elijah, peace be upon him, brought to him the words of retribution from God, foretelling destruction of his house in retribution of shedding Naboth's blood, he did not sit lightly like modern day Israelites.

"He rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and went about dejectedly.

(1 Kings: 21:27)

God was moved by Ahab's penance, although his sin was too exorbitant to be forgiven altogether. Nevertheless, his prayers and fasting averted the punishment momentarily.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah

the Tishbite, saying,

"Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the evil upon his house."

(1 Kings 21: 27-29)

Ahab was eventually killed in a battle against Syrians, his chariot full of his blood was brought back and washed at Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the harlots washed themselves in it. (1 Kings 22: 37-40) The deaths of Ahab's house and that of Jezebel, all involving licking of blood by dogs, are described in (2 Kings: Chapter 9.)

09. Jehoshaphat Fasts Seeking Victory

Again and again have prophets fasted seeking God's help in their times of trouble. Jehoshaphat feared attack of Moabites and Ammonites

and set himself to see the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah and prayed for their victory with God's help. And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the cities of Judah they

came to seek the Lord...with their little ones, their wives, and their children..Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face on the ground, and all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshipping the Lord.

(II Chronicles 20: 3- 18)

It may sound rather odd to modern Jews and Christians imagining how Jehoshaphat and his people fell down before the Lord bowing their heads with their faces on the ground, a very familiar scene throughout the Muslim world five times a day at the time of their prayers.

Jehoshaphat's fast and penance were accepted by God, and he was the one to win the battle.

10. Ezra Fasts Seeking Safety

Ezra [Arabic 'Uzair] undertook numerous journeys informing Israelites who had been spread over Assyrian and Persian territories during and after the days of their exile and captivity. 'Uzair was often accompanied by other people on his journeys; but there used to be times when he had to undertake a shorter journey all by himself. One such journey that Prophet Ezra, peace be upon him, undertook on his donkey, with a little provision of fresh food, is mentioned in Quran.

Looking at a ruined city on his way, he wondered how God would raise the dead (like the people of that city) on the day of Judgement; God liter-

ally showed him how He would do it by allowing him to sleep for over one hundred years. When he was made to wake up, he was asked how long he had slept. Maybe a day or a part of the day was what he could think of. He was told he had slept for one hundred years. He was asked to look at his food (something that goes stale in short time). He found it to be still fresh. Then he was asked to look at his donkey (an animal that takes years in normal circumstances to die.) He found the donkey to have turned into bones. He was shown how bones got together and how they were covered with flesh: He and his donkey were to be a sign for mankind.

And when the matter became clear to him, he said: I know now that Allah is over everything Potent.

(Quran: 2: 259)

After the fall of Babylon at the hands of Cyrus the Persian King, Jews were set free from their slavery and allowed to go anywhere they wanted. Prophet Ezra, peace be upon him, was allowed by the Persian King Artaxerxes, the grandson of Cyrus, to go back to Jerusalem, taking with him whatever people and property he wished to take in order to rebuild the Temple.

The King had offered him armed escort to protect his convoy against highwaymen and other odds, but Prophet Ezra, peace be upon him, was ashamed to accept such an offer, saying, "The hand of our God is for good upon all that seek him, and the

power of his wrath is against all that forsake him." On one of his journeys from Babylon, Ezra and his people camped for three days at the river Ahava, and fasted seeking God's help and protection:

Then I proclaimed a fast there... that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a straight way for ourselves, our children and all our goods...

So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He listened to our entreaty.

(Ezra 8: 15, 21-23)

11. Ezra's Fast of Penance!!

Fast would be used by Ezra for penance before establishing the new covenant. After their return from exile, Jews had a great assembly before the Water Gate in Jerusalem, where Ezra the priest read the Book of Moses, which had not been read during the captivity. People wept out of joy. They kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

Oddly enough, after this festivity was over, some (jealous and deprived!) people realised that they and their sons had brought a number of foreign women as wives who, it seemed to them, were responsible for taking them away from the worship of their Lord. Some of them thought God was angry with them because of these alien women, 'so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of

the lands." (Ezra:9:1-2.) A very strange half-truth, this, perhaps a case of a subtle manipulation or distortion of the original text in later times. As a matter of fact, God was angry because of those women; but not because they were non-Jewish, belonging to some 'unholy' race, but because they had brought in the worship of their gods in Israelites and Israelites had failed to stop it.

Israelites were perhaps unwilling to have these foreign women' initiated in their ways, and in their religion in particular. Somehow, it can be said, they were jealous about sharing their worship of One God even with their own wives, sons and daughters — although it was against any rationalistic reason, and against God's own commandment.

So far as God getting angry over Israelites marrying non-Jewish women has been a self-made myth and a lie throughout Jewish history. Again and again were they reprimanded and punished for harbouring such ungodly ideas — But Israelites were not a people who would learn from God: God had not been angry with Joseph for having an Egyptian wife, Geliho (or Zuleykha); God was not angry with Moses for having an Ishmaelite wife, Jethro's daughter, Zipporah (Saffoorah) in his earlier days. As a matter of fact, Miriam and Aaron objected to Moses marrying the Cushite woman later, and they were amply punished for it. (Numbers: 12: 1-15) Isaiah is on record to have encouraged 'foreigners' and 'eunuchs' to be gathered to the covenant of God 'for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'. (Isaiah: 56:3-8.) But hard-hearted

Jews never learn; they are never warned!

It is debatable whether Ezra really thought in terms of race or worship of foreign idols in the house of his Lord when the issue of foreign women came up. It is possible that the later authors and copyists made it sound like a racist issue what in fact was a genuine issue of getting rid of the worship of foreign gods.

Throwing away the baby along with the basket would not be the real solution of the problem. If foreign gods were a problem, throwing away wives of these Jewish people and their own sons and daughters was something foolish which would never be approved by any God worth that name. If the original Jews had been willing, they could have taught the new-comers to see what it was to worship one God rather than a multitude of them.

Jews have always tried to cleverly implicate some of the most respected figures in their own history, projecting them in cases of villainy – as soon as they are removed just one step out of their own direct lineage. To recall a few such cases:

(1) Between Abraham and Lot, the two relatives who left Haran together, Lot becomes the villainous incestuous father of the Amonites and Moabites.. (God protect us against such a lie!)

(2) Of the two famous sons of Abraham, they show Ishmael to be the villain and Isaac the hero.

(3) Out of the two sons of Isaac, they show Esau to be the villain, Jacob the hero.

(4) Out of the two famous wives of Jacob, Rachel, his most beloved wife of Jacob, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, the greatest of all Jacob's sons in honour and station is the one to be blamed for having stolen her father's gods – only because she was not mother of Yehuda. The Jewish tradition does not implicate Leah, their own great-grandmother, involved in stealing foreign gods.

(5) Out of the many sons of Jacob, unfortunately for them Joseph was the one who became the one to be worshipped by the sun and the moon and the eleven stars – but Joseph's sons are out of picture, whereas Yehuda the villainest of all villains who commits incest with his own daughter-in-law, siring the descendants of Yahuda, becomes the hero; the sons of Moses somehow get superseded by the sons of Aaron to be leaders in all religious activities.

One can go on and on looking at these distorted versions and false accusations! Their own most sacred Book is the greatest witness against them!

Anyway, coming back to Prophet Ezra, we can see that he was emphasising 'faithlessness' of these people, not purity or impurity of their race:

"When I heard this, I rent my garments

and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered round me..

And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my *fasting*, with my garments and my mantle rent, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God saying... "

(Ezra, 9:3-4)

On the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled with *fasting* and in sackcloth, and with earth upon their heads.

(Nehemiah: Chapters 8 & 9)

Prophet Ezra made a beautiful prayer of confession and repentance (Ezra 9:6-15). Addressing God he made a new covenant which Israelite princes, Levites, and priests endorsed by putting their seals on it. (Nehemiah 9:6-38.) The covenant required Israelites to 'put away all these wives and their children..' (Ezra 10:3.)

Of course there were, even in those days, some people of conscience who opposed this racist interpretation and its inhuman consequence. Human Rights Activists of today should write the names of these four rejecters in gold, but they are the villains of the history.

Only Jonathan the son of As'ahel and Jahzei'ah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshul'lam and Shab'bethai the Levite supported them.

(Ezra, 10:15)

Who can keep his head cool when 'heroes' are led by their blind whims! It's equally easy to throw the blame on Prophets in retrospect to support later personal follies of individuals. History does not record in this case what happened to those women and children husbanded and sired by Jewish people, only to be abandoned later on as outcasts.

Their wives, sons, and daughters gave them love and support when they were in exile and needed their help the most; as soon as they reached their 'promised land', the first thing they did was to get rid of their loving wives and their beloved children whom they had brought six to seven hundred miles away from their ancestral lands. They were abandoned on the border as unwanted people, on the flimsy plea that they had made their race impure! The wives and the children, in the meantime, had no access even to the modern-day heartless facility of 'forced repatriation'. How must they have suffered to be abandoned like that in a land foreign to them!

12. Isaiah Defines Acceptable Fasts

The Prophet Isaiah, peace be upon him, lived in the 8th century BC. His call to prophesy in about 742

BC coincided with attacks of Assyrians towards west, including Jerusalem and Judah. Isaiah proclaimed this to be a warning from God to a godless people. Formal worship, sacrifices, incenses, assemblies observed by Israelites together with iniquity are repugnant to God. Isaiah, peace be upon him, is addressing a sinful nation, laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers.

In this city princes are rebels, companions of thieves, running after bribes and gifts. They do not defend the fatherless, and widow's cause does not come to them..(Isaiah, 1: 12-26) His people honour God only with their lips, their hearts staying far away from Lord. (29:13) He warns people, but they do not hear.

At the verge of the First destruction of Jerusalem, in vain do they worship and pray and fast, because the form of worship and fast is there, but the spirit is missing. The same *worshipping* and *fasting* people are busy in their deeds of *wickedness*. God therefore asks Isaiah to declare to his people their transgression and sins.

This schism of form and content, rituals full of pomp but devoid of spirit, permeating law, but all without morality could be true of any modern nation, including Jews, Christians, and Muslims:

Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God..

(Isaiah: 58:1-2)

These pretentious people complain to God about non-acceptance of their prayers and fasts:

"Why have we fasted and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?

(Isaiah 58:3)

The answer God had for those people of 27 centuries ago could still be just as true about any of us today – Jews, Christians, and Muslims when our prayers seem to be going unheard:

Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure; and oppress all your workers; Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist; Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high (by Allah, God).

(Isaiah 58: 3-5)

This is not the kind of fast that God chooses or accepts. This is the kind of fast Prophets Jeremiah, Joel and, later on, Jesus and Muhammad, peace be upon them all, would condemn in their times.

However, one need not despair. Even through Isaiah God tells us what kind of fast is acceptable to Him.

Pious Jews, and good Christians and Muslims would find guidance and strength in this definition of fast provided by God through Isaiah: a fast that is

accompanied by pious acts of freeing fellow human beings from hardship, and a desire to shun wickedness.

Is not this the fast that I choose?

to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

(Isaiah: 58: 6-7)

(i.e. poor relatives who are in need of your help.)

This is the eternal message that would find echo about 12 centuries later in revelations to Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Have We not made for him two eyes, and a tongue, and two lips, and We have shown unto him the two highways (of good and evil)?

But he does not attempt the Ascent! And what shall make you understand what Ascent is?

It is freeing the neck (from the yoke of slavery). Or feeding in a day of hard privation, An orphan, a near of kin, Or a poor

man cleaving to the dust;

And then to be one of those who believe and exhort one another to perseverance, and exhort one another to compassion.

They are the ones whose place will be on the right hand (of God).

(Quran, 90: 8-18)

These virtuous acts are not replacements for fasts, but the fasts are 'acceptable' to God if they are accompanied by these virtuous acts.

A person who fasts and does exactly the opposite of these good acts (indulging into wickedness, putting fellow human beings in bonds of slavery, creating deliberate hardship for the less fortunate) will find his fasts rejected by God the Almighty.

The reward of fasting is really great if the fasts truly meet the criteria of acceptance of the Lord:

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,

and your healing shall spring up speedily, your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;

You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am."

(Isaiah: 58:6-9)

We get similar message through the Last Prophet, Muhammad, peace be upon him, a number of times. Quran says:

And your Lord says: Call Me I shall answer you; Indeed those who are stiff-necked against my worship now, They will shortly enter Gehenum as contemptible.

(Quran: Mo'min: 40: 60)

And when My bondmen ask you about Me, Then (say): surely, I am nearby; I answer the call of the caller, when he calls Me; So let them respond to Me (in My commandments), And believe in Me, Maybe they will find the right path.

(Quran: 2:186)

13. Jeremiah Explains Unacceptability of Fasts

Prophet Jeremiah (about 650 BC- 570 BC) also lived about the same time as Isaiah, and just like Isaiah, he too warned his people against the approaching destruction of Jerusalem because of ungodly activities of the people. He brought message from God for the people of Judah and Jerusalem who had turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear God's words, having gone after other gods to serve (worship) them.

Therefore says the Lord,

"I am bringing evil upon them which they can not escape. Though they will cry to me, I will not listen to them".

(Jeremiah 11: 9-11.)

Faith fails to avail these people, as it is fast only in form, not in spirit.

The Lord said to me: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people.

Though they fast, I will not hear their cry;

and though they offer burnt offering and cereal offering, I will not accept them;

but I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence."

(Jeremiah 14: 11-12)

Accepting a prayer accompanied with fast God Almighty averts calamities, as Prophet Jeremiah was told; on the other hand, it is likely that a people may lose graces from God for their being ungrateful.

'Then the word of Lord came to me,' (says Jeremiah):

"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?"
says the Lord.

**"Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand,
so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."
(Jeremiah: 18:5-6)**

Prayer may avert a calamity that God had intended:

**If at any time I declare concerning a nation
or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and
break down and destroy it, and if that
nation, concerning which I have spoken,
turns from its evil, I will repent (i.e. relent)
of the evil that I intended to do to it.**

(Jeremiah: 18:7-8)

Arrogance and evil of a people may turn away the blessings that God had initially intended:

**And if at any time I declare concerning a
nation or a kingdom that I will build and
plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not
listening to my voice, then I will repent
(i.e. turn away) from the good which I had
intended to do to it.**

(Jeremiah: 18: 9-10)

**Now therefore say to the men of Judah
and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "Thus
says the Lord, 'Behold, I am shaping evil
against you and devising a plan against
you. Return, every one from his evil way,
and amend your ways and your doings.'"**

(Jeremiah: 18:11)

Prophet Jeremiah, peace be upon him, was

attacked in the Temple; he was put in a prison with a yoke on his neck; and was debarred from entering the house of the Lord, all because his prophecies were unacceptable to the political powers of the day.

Jeremiah dictated the word of God to Baruch asking him to read it to the people in the house of the Lord on a fast day.

This was done in the ninth month when all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem, including the king, proclaimed a fast before the Lord. Baruch read the message from God through Jeremiah but the king got hold of the scroll and burnt it in the fire.

Jehoikim, the king did this without fearing God in the least.

Jeremiah asked Baruch to write the message again, adding that there would be none to sit on the throne of David, and that Jehoikim, the king's body would be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night.

(Jeremiah 36: 30-31)

Then came the incident about which the Quran says:

**So when the time for the first of the two
(promises of punishment) came, We
roused against you servants of Ours of
great might; Then they ravaged (your)
houses; and it was a threat (well) per-
formed.**

(Quran: 17:5)

14. Fasts of Nineveh Avert A Calamity

Whereas Isaiah and Jeremiah refer to the incident of non-repentance that brought in the promised punishment, the incident mentioned in the *Book of Jonah* shows how a punishment from God was averted at the last minute with the blessing of fast and prayers.

Prophet Jonah (Nabi Yunus), peace be upon him, was asked to go to Nineveh (modern Mosul in Iraq) about 785 B.C. to warn people against their transgressions, asking them to repent.

'Yet forty days', cried Jonah, 'and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'

When the signs of punishment approached, the people of Nineveh believed in God, proclaimed a **fast**, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least, (that is from the richest and the most powerful to the poorest and the weakest.)...

The king of Nineveh also removed his (royal) robe and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.. and decreed.. let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed or drink water... but... let them cry mightily to God..

In addition to observing the fast and the prayers it was their turning away from their sins that benefited the people of Nineveh:

Yea, let everyone turn from his evil way

and from the violence which is in his hands.

Who knows God may yet repent¹ (or relent), and turn from His fierce anger, so that we perish not.'

(*Jonah: 3:4-9*)

God did relent at the eleventh hour.

He always accepts and answers what His servants pray for, but this relenting forgiveness in the face of an imminent punishment was rare in history.

¹ Repentance becomes humans, not God. When man does something the consequences of which, unknown to him, turn out to be foolish or Evil, he repents, expressing his remorse to a higher authority, God or Allah. There is nothing God would do whose consequences would not be foreknown to Him, similarly, He would do nothing whose consequences would later on make Him repent to anyone higher than Him; because none is greater than Him. Although the two words 'killer' and 'killed' are derived from the same root, the two persons in question are exactly the opposite of one another. Similarly, from the same root TWB, we have 'Taaib' and 'Tawwab': first is the human being who returns repentant, the other is God who returns to the human being relenting because of his repentance. As man cannot be Tawwab, so God cannot be Taaib. People 'Taabuw', repent, and God 'Atuwb alaihim', relents over them, as He is Tawwabur-Raheem, the Relenting, the Merciful (2:160). (*Muslims would discriminate between the two words, not expecting God to 'repent', but rather **relent**. Neither is God sorry of the consequences after His punishment has been decreed upon a people: 'He is not afraid of the consequences [of punishment,] (91: 15)

ry of Divine relationship with humans. That was so because people deeply involved in iniquities have not been known to be readily willing to give up their ways. Quran testifies to the rare nature of this deliverance of the people of Yunus:

If only there had been a community (among all those who were destroyed in old days) that believed and then profited by its belief as did the people of Jonah!

When they believed We drew off from them the moment of disgrace in the life of the world and gave them comfort for a while.

(Quran: 11:98)

As the Old Testament's author of the *Book of Jonah* points out:

"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented (that is, relented) of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it."

(Jonah, 3:10)

Jonah, peace be upon him, is reported to have felt a great amount of pity for the little plant that sprouted and withered. God said,

"You pity for the plant... And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which

there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle."

(Jonah, 4:11)

Earlier Jonah, peace be upon him, had his share of mercy and forgiveness from God because of his 'fasting and prayer' after he tried to run away from his assignment and was swallowed by the Fish:

And (remember) Dhan-Noon (Jonah)! when he went off in anger and deemed that We had no authority over him; Then he cried out in the darkness, (saying)

There is no God save You; You are Glorified: I have been a wrong-doer.

(Quran 21: 87)

This is one of the most beautiful prayers Allah Subhanahoo wa Ta'aala has taught us in addition to the prayers of Adam, Abraham, and Job (Ayoob), and other Prophets, peace be upon them all. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have said, "It does not become anyone to consider himself better than Yunus Bin Matti." He, peace be upon him, is also reported to have said, "Whoever prays to God along with this prayer of Nabi Yunus, his prayer shall certainly be answered by Allah Subhanahoo wa ta'aala."

Sa'ad Bin Abi WaqaaS, who was present with

the Prophet at that time, asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, whether this prayer was meant to be specially for Nabi Jonah or it was generally for all believers. The Prophet said, "It was special for Jonah, and is general for all believers. Don't you read in Quran that God says, 'Then We heard his prayer, and saved him from the anguish, and in this way do We save believers.'"

Then We heard (answered) his prayer, and saved him from the anguish; And in this way do We save believers.

(Quran 21:88)

15. Daniel's Fasts Bring Visions of Salvation

Prophet Daniel, peace be upon him, was one of the Prophets who perhaps accompanied Nebuchadnezzar II in the captivity of Babylon, and lived in the courts of the Persian kings: Belshazzar, Darius I, and Cyrus II. After 70 years of captivity, Daniel

turned [his] face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, and prayed to the Lord, his God, and made confession.

(Daniel, 9:1-3)

He makes a long and touchingly beautiful prayer, in response to which Gabriel, peace be upon him, comes to tell Daniel visions in one of which he tells him, "Blessed is he who waits and comes to

the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.." Prophet Daniel's fasts and prayers did not go in vain. Cyrus the Persian king was soon to conquer Babylon and set Israelites free.

16. Joel Exhorts People to Repent and Fast

Prophet Joel the son of Pethuel, may peace be upon him, who prophesied before the second destruction of the Temple, sometime after 516 BC, exhorts his people to pray and fast so that Judah and Jerusalem may receive salvation:

**Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.
Gather the elders and all the inhabitants
of the land to the house of the Lord, your
God; and cry to the Lord. ..**

God is always willing to accept the repentance of His bondmen:

"Yet even now", says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

External exhibition of piety is reprehensible and rend your hearts, and not your garments."

Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents (relents) of evil.

Who knows whether He will not turn and
repent (relent), and leave a blessing behind
him, ... Blow the trumpet... sanctify a fast
... and say

"Spare thy people O Lord... Why should
they say among the peoples, 'Where is
their God?'"

(Joel 1:14; 2:12-17)

The Book of Joel further tells us that Lord
heard these prayers and showered his graces on
these people

Lord became jealous for his land and had
pity on his people, sending grain, wine,
and oil to their satisfaction, removing
northerner far from them, asking them to
rejoice and not to fear...

This is because prayers and fasts of the bond
men do not go in vain!

And it shall come to pass that all who
call upon the name of the Lord shall be
delivered..

(Joel 2: 18-32)

This incident before the second destruction of
the Temple is also confirmed by the Quran:

Then We gave you once again your turn

(of victory and prosperity) against them,
and We added you with wealth and chil-
dren, and We made you numerous in man-
power.

If you do well, you will do well for your-
selves; and if (some of) you do evil,
then it is for them likewise.

(Quran: 17: 6-7)

Adversity did not help these people return to
their God, neither did prosperity help them learn
much. It seems the people were not willing to heed
the prophet, and eventually came the promised
destruction.

17, Esther's Fasts

Similar to Jezebel's fasts would be the fasts of
Esther, the Jewish counterpart of Delilah the wife
of Samson. Delilah, the Philistine woman, used her
charms to coax the secret of Samson's strength out
of him, using her sexual attraction to betray a
Jewish enemy of Philistines. Esther, a Jewish
woman, used her sexual attraction to seduce the
Persian king inciting him to allow a genocide of his
own people killing seventy-five thousand eight
hundred non-Jewish Persian subjects of the King.
One wonders which one of the two women was
cleverer!

The intrigue started when the bashful queen
Vashti refused to appear before the drunken audi-
ence 'to show her beauty'. At the courtiers' persua-

sion the king threw the queen out of favour and agreed to enjoying virgins until he would find one that he would like to have as a new queen. Courtiers told the king:

Let beautiful young virgins be sought out .. And let the .. officers in all the provinces .. gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa.. And let the maiden who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This pleased the king and he did so.

(Esther 2:1-4)

Esther found her way into the harem of the king without making known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai (her cousin and guardian) had charged her not to make it known.

(Esther: 2:10-11)

In plain English, no one knew that she was a foreign Jewish woman aspiring to get into the harem of the king. (In Esther we have a fine illustration of how secret service used to work in ancient times utilising the charms of 'beautiful women' for personal or national gains!)

(Later generations of Bani Israel are known to have used their womenfolk for their political advancement in the courts of foreign kings. In order to justify their own immoral behaviour, they ascribed, in retrospection and rather boldly, similar anecdotes to their earlier Patriarchs Abraham (*Genesis* Chapter 20) and Isaac (*Genesis* Chapter 26)

who are shown to have been willing to disclaim their wives (Sarah and Rebekah, peace be upon them) willing to send them in the harems of foreign kings, claiming for their wives to be their sisters for fear of getting killed because of their beautiful wives.

This kind of aspersion is a great lie and an insult to the very names of these great prophets of God who are expected to be the models of moral behaviour, beautiful example, [uswatun hasanah]. No cowardly common man will lower himself to conducting himself in such way as regards his wife. Any intelligent person reading the two stories in chapters 20 and 26 of the Book of *Genesis*, will find both of the stories so similar in most details that he can tell the scribes didn't know for sure if this incident occurred in the life of Sarah or Rebekah or both, peace be upon them both. They ended up writing the same story twice, almost in the same words, only with Sarah's name was replaced by Rebekah's in the second story.)

The procedure of Esther's getting into the harem is described in such detail that it is easy for us even today to understand what this 'queen consent' meant:

'Now when the turn came for each maiden to go in to king Ahasuerus...In the evening she went, and in the morning she came back to the second harem.. in charge of the concubines; she did not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.'

Once Esther was inside the harem Mordecai started playing the cards the clever courtiers usually play. He found a way of persuading the king that there were some people in the court plotting to kill the king: an easy ploy to trap any king's imagination.

Mordecai would sit at the gate (with his eyes and ears open, as we would say, for any rumors or slips of tongues, loose talks, jokes, and wait for the right moment to produce his collected 'evidence' to gain access and prominence in the court. Lo, and behold!): two of the king's eunuchs .. sought to kill the king.. And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai..and he told it to the Queen Esther and Esther told it to the (gullible!) king. The affair was investigated into and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows...

(In the mean time) Haman was promoted.. people used to do obeisance to him according to the king's command. Mordecai wouldn't do obeisance. (They would ask him the reason for his being a rude brute, to say it in the modern idiom.) 'Why do you transgress the king's command?' ... He told them he was a Jew (making him immune to obeisance.)

So Haman sought to destroy all Jews.. (made the words: all Jews, not only Mordecai!) ..Lots were cast, and Haman persuaded the king that it was not for the profit of the king to tolerate the Jews who had different ways. A date was set to kill all the Jews in the land. Mordecai came to know of the plot and asked Esther to take up the matter with

the king.

Contrary to the claim that she was crowned for the queen, Esther seems to be only one of the many concubines with little influence with the king.) She sent back message to the effect that no one could approach the king without being summoned.

And I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

Mordecai sent her message to think of her people who were in the constant danger of being killed, thanks to the intrigues of Mordecai. Sensing the gravity of the situation Esther sent Mordecai a message back:

"Go gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

(Esther 4:16-17.)

To cut the long story short, the king was mortified at this fasted, dieting beauty who succeeded in persuading him to withdraw earlier orders of allowing all the Jews in his kingdom to be killed. Instead the king was persuaded into issuing fresh orders allowing Jews to kill all their enemies

throughout his kingdom..

In Susa the capital itself the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men, and also slew (names of some Persian nobles).. the enemy of Jews..

The next day.. Esther went with further petition 'If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict'...

(That is, as the first day of massacre had gone so well, why not allow Jews to continue the massacre of Persians in their own land for the second day as well!)

So the king commanded this to be done... they slew three hundred men in Susa.

Now the Jews who were in king's provinces... slew seventyfive thousand of those who hated them..

This was on the 13th day of the month of Adar... Therefore the Jews... celebrate ... a day of gladness and feasting and holiday-making, and a day on which they send choice portions to one another.

(*Esther, 9: 1-19*)

The historical authenticity of many of these claims is questioned by Biblical scholars. We must leave a great room for exaggeration with regard to

the claimed importance of Esther in the palace, the plots and intrigues of Persian opponents of the king, the eunuchs, as well as those of Mordecai and Esther.

Similarly, it is hard to imagine that a king would allow so many of Jews or his own subjects, Persians, to be killed only because Haman or Esther would succeed in persuading him into allowing it. Be it as it may, the *Book of Esther* is a product of Jewish imagination, and a document against their own selves. All we learn from it is that they loved to get themselves involved in intrigues to get to the seat of power and, blind to the possible repercussions, they loved to use their power against even the host nations. Their ingratitude to their liberators added to their universal hatred for all nations other than Jewish: that is the hallmark of this *Book of Esther*, a witness against the Jewish people.

Read thy own Book

Sufficient are you against yourself today as a reckoner.

(*Quran: 17:14*)

They shall say: 'We testify against ourselves.'

**And the life of the world beguiled them.
And they testify against themselves that they were disbelievers.**

(*Quran 6:130*)

As Biblical critics have pointed out God does not exist for Jewish people in the *Book of Esther*. And this Book is not mentioned even once in the entire book. And this Book is not written by Christians or Muslims, but by Jews themselves: it is from their own pens that they stand condemned.

While reading the *Book of Esther*, we must not forget that Cyrus the Persian king (died 529 BC) had set Jews free from the shackles of Babylonian King, allowing them to go and live wherever they liked. Xerxes, the king during Esther's days ruled 486-465 BC. In about 40 years time, the Jews were ready with their intrigues and succeeded in killing 800 Persians in Susa, the capital, and seventyfive thousand others in provinces in their own land. Persians were being paid back for their generosity.

The *Book of Esther* is read by millions of Jews, and they are probably still proud of her for having saved them from destruction. This tells a great deal about Jewish character if the reader were anything other than Jewish. A day of salvation indeed! Mark the text:

For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to king Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren (i.e. Jews), for he sought the welfare of his people (i.e. Jews) and spoke peace to all his people (i.e. Jews).
(*Esther* 10: 3.)

That's what Jews do when they find themselves in a position of authority: they seek welfare and peace of no people other than Jews.

19. Zechariah's Fasts of Festivity and Mourning

After the Temple was rebuilt, people came to Zechariah, peace be upon him, (about 500 years before Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist) to ask him if they had to fast in the fifth month (Av) commemorating the destruction of the first temple as they had done for so many years during the captivity. Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to Zechariah.

At times the Prophet received good news:

The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth.. shall be to the Judah seasons of gladness and joy, and cheerful feasts; therefore love truth and peace.

(*Zechariah* 8:18-19)

At other times Zechariah would bitterly complain:

When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years,

was it for me that you fasted?
And when you eat and when you drink,

do you not eat for yourselves?..

(Zechariah 7:3-6) ...

Zechariah would bring the message of God to these hard-hearted people:

Thus saith the Lord,

“ Render true judgements, Show kindness and mercy each to his brother, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart..”

(Zechariah 7: 8-11)

Beautiful words from Lord God deserving attention from all of His chosen people. The message asks for good deeds from all his 'chosen' people. Muslims hear the echo of the same message loud and clear, in almost similar words from Allah Subahanahu wat-Ta'ala to be recited, in part, in every Friday Khutba, the sermon throughout the mosques of the world where-ever there is a Muslim community.

Indeed, Allah commands you to Justice and Kindness (good turns), and giving to kinsfolk, and forbids you vulgarity and wickedness and oppression.

He exhorts you in order that you may take heed.

And fulfil the covenant with Allah when you have covenanted; and break not your oaths after their confirmation; and after you have made Allah surety over you. Indeed Allah knows what you do.

(Quran: 16: 90-91)

People of Zechariah, peace be upon him, listened to hearken (listen) to these words. They had 'better' interests to pursue.

Therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. “As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear.”

(Zechariah 7:9-13)

This kind of attitude of the Israelites prepared the way for the eventual second destruction of the Temple.

So when the time for the second of the judgements came (We roused against you others of Our bondmen) to ravage your faces, and to enter the Temple even as they entered it the first time, and to lay waste all that they conquered with an utter wasting.

(Quran 17: 7)

Israelites had been famous for playing games with God. Whenever the Israelites were given

power and authority, they flouted and defied God's authority and brought iniquity, death and destruction on earth. There came moments again in their history when God took over and Jews faced some kind of diaspora or holocaust.

All of the People of the Book (Jews, Christians as well as Muslims) need to hearken to the same words reached to us through all these Prophets, peace be upon them all, if we wish to avoid similar punishments for us.

19. Jewish Fasts As Observed in Modern Times

Jews in modern times celebrate six fasts:

- (1) Jews fast on their most solemn festival 'Yom Kippur' (Day of Atonement) on the 10th day of the seventh month, 'Ashar be Tishri, roughly on 30th September.

According to Jewish traditions, it is a day when sins are confessed and expiated and man and God are reconciled. It is also the last of the Days of Judgement and the holiest day of the Jewish year. Yom Kippur is celebrated at the end of the ten-day penitence beginning Rosh Hashnah, it is marked by fasting, penitence, and prayer.

Work, eating, drinking, washing, anointing one's body, sexual intercourse, and donning leather shoes are forbidden.

- (2) 'Ashara be-Tevet (Fast of Tevet 10, roughly 2nd or 3rd of January) commemorates the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylonia, in 588 BCE.

- (3) Shiva' 'Ashara be-Tammuz (Fast of Tammuz 17, roughly 10th or 11th July) commemorates the first breach in the wall of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. It initiates three weeks of semi-mourning that culminates with Tisha be-Av (9th of Av, roughly 30th July or 1st August, the month of water or rains.)

- (4) Tisha be-Av (The Fast of Av 9) commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in 586 BCE and 70 CE. The most solemn of the five fasts, its self-denials are more rigorous than those prescribed for the others.

- (5) Tzom Gedaliahu (Fast of Gedaliah) commemorates the slaying of Gedaliah, Governor of Judah after the destruction of the First Temple.

- (6) Ta'anit Esther (Fast of Esther), which commemorates Esther's fast
(*Esther 4:16*).

FASTS AS PRACTICED BY JESUS AND PEOPLE AROUND HIM

Fasts are known to have been observed in the times of Prophet Jesus, peace be upon him. As he was born in Jewish family, his mother, Maryam, grandmother, Prophetess Annah, and all other relatives were observers of fasts and prayers according to Jewish tradition.

20. Zachariah and Mary's 'Fasts of Speech'

Zachariah and Elizabeth .. (the parents of John the Baptist— who came about 500 years after the earlier Zachariah) were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. (Luke 1: 5-6)

One who kept 'all the commandments', would, naturally, observe fasting as well. When Zachariah was informed of the son he was going to be bestowed with in his old age, he was 'struck dumb' from before the baby's conception to the birth, because he did not believe God's words (Luke: 1:20). The author of the Gospel According to Luke seems to suggest that it had been a sort of punishment for Zachariah.

However, according to the Quran, far from being a punishment, it was a sort of blessing that needed an expression of gratitude. It would be insulting for God to be so fickle-minded and touchy to be offended because of the ignorance of human beings. It would be a moody God who is just about to bless someone with a son because of his prayers and the next moment, He gets upset and angry, ready to punish the same bondman because of his inability to comprehend the extent of the infinite wisdom of his Creator. This whimsical erratic fickle-mindedness does not become Divinity. The source of this inconsistency is certainly the finite wisdom of human scribes and copyists.

Zachariah didn't have to be punished for expressing his wonder at the wonderfully 'incredible' news. Abraham, peace be upon him, had also expressed his 'wonder' when he was given the news of Isaac's birth; Sarah, peace be upon her, was also happily surprised at the same news, and they protested about their old age and sterility. Zachariah's expression of surprise was in the same vein, not an expression of disbelief but an exclamation of wonder and surprise. Maryam, peace be upon her, would express her wonder when she is informed of the miraculous conception of Jesus, peace be upon him.

Zachariah's 'inability' to speak was voluntary, an assignment from God, a sign, an Ayah, on his own demand (one that he asked for, not one that was imposed upon him by God as a sort of punishment). This sign or ayah enabled him to fast in

order to express his gratitude – and the fast included the 'fast of speech' (in addition to the fast of food and drink), and this was all without any bodily defect involved.

"He said, "Assign for me a sign". (Allah) said, "Your sign is that you shall not speak to anyone from mankind for three days save by gestures, and remember your Lord much, and hallow Him in the evening and morning.""

(Quran: 3:41)

In this passage Quran corrects the misinformation from the scribes or narrators regarding the length of Zachariah's 'speech-fast' or 'dumbness' (three days and three nights as against the entire period of pregnancy of his wife, as claimed by the *New Testament*).

The next passage, touching on the period of fast of 'speech' goes on to correct the second misstatement regarding his being struck dumb as a sort of 'punishment' for not believing the news the first time.

Zachariah asked for this sign, and it was meant to express his gratitude to God for having blessed him with a son at his old age. He was asked not to speak to any one, and Quran tells it specifically, that it was all while he was perfectly sound in health:

He (Zachariah) said, " Appoint for me a sign." (That is, tell me what I should do to thank you for

this blessing.)

(Allah) said, "Your sign is that you shall not speak to mankind for three nights (and days) while sound".

(Quran 19:10)

Apparently, during the Biblical Times, one of the frequently used aspects of the fast was abstaining from speech in addition to abstaining from food and drink.

In these parallel stories of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, peace be upon them both, the parents are required to observe such fasts for some particular reasons:

In the case of John, Zachariah observes his 'fast involving speech' in order to express his gratitude for the Miraculous birth of his son at such old age and in spite of his wife's infertility; in the case of Jesus it is to announce his Miraculous conception and birth without the help of a male parent, and his eventual prophethood. Both of the stories suggest God's Ability to do what He desires.

He says, "Be", and there it is.

After the birth of Jesus, Maryam, peace be upon her, is asked to observe a fast of speech so instead of her, the child shall do the talking declaring his mother's innocence:

And if you see of humans anyone, say (in gestures): 'Indeed I have vowed to the Compassionate (God) a fast, so I shall not speak to anyone today.'

(Quran 19: 26)

Then she brought the baby to her people, car-

rying him.

They said, "O Maryam, you have brought a thing unheard of. O sister of Haroon, your father was not a man of evil, nor was your mother unchaste."

(Quran 19: 27-28)

So (Then) she pointed to him.

(i.e. suggesting for them to ask the baby.)

They said: "How can we speak to one who is in crib, a mere child?"

(Quran 19: 29)

He (the baby Jesus in the cradle) said,

"Indeed, I am a bondman of Allah. He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet, and He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and purity as long as I am alive, and duty to my mother; He has not made me high-handed and unblest; and peace be on me on the day I was born and the day I die and the day I am raised up again."

(Quran: 19:30-33)

"Such is Isa son of Maryam; this is the word of truth, wherein they are doubting."

(Quran 19:34)

The Quran teaches Muslims, its main readers, that Jesus, peace be upon him, spoke in his infancy, and they believe this wholeheartedly without a grain of doubt in their hearts.

Remnants of the presence of such a concept in the New Testament are witnessed in Luke (2: 41-44) showing John in his mother's womb leaping at the greetings of Mary, the mother of Jesus, may peace be upon them all. However, the story in the Gospel of Luke has not been carried to its natural conclusion:

If John reacts to the greetings in his mother's womb to honour Jesus, Jesus should be capable of doing something equally miraculous in his pre- or post-natal days. Where is that miraculous response of Jesus?

Perhaps, the author of *The Gospel According to Luke* did not pursue this theme any further for the fear of being ridiculed; perhaps, something of the kind did exist in the original, but later copyists dropped it! It would be safer for the conscience of the copyist to just drop it or change the subject. Later copyists and scribes would drop words and expressions they were afraid people would find hard to believe to be true, or did not serve their interests, as we shall see how the references to fasting were dropped in the story of driving out devils.

For Muslims Allah is not afraid of anybody ridiculing Him, and His Prophet only passes on what is put in his mouth. This Quranic emphasis on Jesus speaking to people when he was a baby in the cradle is substantially different from the

Christian concept projected in the Nativity scene where the Magians (Persian Religious Men, not really Kings), having travelled thousands of miles from Persia to the Holy Land only to pay homage to the new-born baby, are told to be quiet as the baby is sleeping.'

11. Prophetess Anna Fasts and Prays

At the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, peace be upon him, there were pious Jews who kept their prayers and fasts. The 'Prophetess Anna', the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher was one of them. She is reported to have been of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow, till she was eighty-four.

'She did not depart from the temple, working, with fasting and prayer night and day.'

When they brought the baby Jesus in the Temple for circumcision Prophetessannah (probably his grandmother) was there, as was Simeon who also sings a hymn in his praise.

'And coming up at that very hour she (Prophetess Anna) gave thanks to God (i.e. God the Creator), and spoke of him (i.e. God) to all who were looking for the

redemption of Jerusalem.'

(Luke 2, 36-38)

This Prophetess Annah (in Hebrew and Arabic 'Hannah') sounds like a very curious figure. But if we search around for her identity, we find in Islamic tradition that she might be none other than Mary's mother, maternal grandmother of Jesus, peace be upon them all. Elizabeth, Zachariah's wife, John the Baptist's mother is Anna's sister or cousin.

In Quran this illustrious woman is referred to as 'Imraat 'Imraan' (the wife of 'Imraan in the Surah called Ale 'Imraan, the Household of 'Imran.) Anna or Hanna is the namesake of the earlier Anna, the mother of Samuel, who was also from the family of Asher – both prayed for sons who were promised to be given away to Temple's service as 'nazar'.

The earlier Anna got Samuel for her son to be given in the service of the Temple – where he was distinguished for having won wars for his people against the Philistines and for having appointed Saul to be the first King of Bani Israel. The latter Annah got Mary, who is the first woman to be given in the service of the Temple – thus initiating the institution of Nunnery in Christianity, an improvement on or an extension of the system of 'nazarine' in Judaism which included only male members.

Thus Annah's story can't be separated from the story of Mary and Jesus, peace be upon them all. Luke referred to her, as was natural for him to do so; but having initiated the reference to her, he for-

got what to do with her. Quran shows us the relationship of Prophetess Anna with Mary and Jesus, peace be upon them all.

Remember when wife of 'Imran (i.e. Prophetess Anna of Luke) said: "My Lord I have vowed unto Thee that which is in my womb as a consecrated offering. Accept it from me! Behold, You, only You are the Hearer, the Knower!"

(Quran: 3:35)

And when she was delivered, she said:

"My Lord, see, I am delivered of a female!"

Allah knew best of what she was delivered. The male is not as the female! — and (she said) 'see I have named her Maryam, and see, I seek your protection for her and for her offspring from Satan the outcast.'

And her Lord accepted her (Maryam) with goodly acceptance and provided to her a goodly growth; and made Zachariah her guardian.

(Quran 3: 36-37)

That brings us to the point in the story where we see the parallels in the stories of Zachariah and

Yahya (John) with Maryam and Jesus, peace be upon them all and how they were related to one another!

22. Jesus Fasts in the Wilderness

After his baptism at the hands of John, Jesus, peace be upon him, 'full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil.

**And he ate nothing in those forty days;
and when they were ended, he was hungry.'**

(Luke 4:1-2)

The devil tempted Jesus, peace be upon him, quoting from the scriptures prompting him to turn the stone to bread; the devil offered to give Jesus all the authority and glory of this world if he agreed to worship him (the devil); and, finally, the devil tried to persuade Jesus to throw himself down the pinnacle of the Temple, assuring him that angels of God would be in charge of him (protecting him.)

Each time Jesus responded appropriately with the help of God quoting from scriptures: In response to the temptations, he told the Satan, it is written that 'man shall not live by bread alone', that 'you shall not worship any one besides God', and that 'thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God'.
(Luke: 4: 1-11.)

It is a rather peculiar fact that of all the Prophets in the Old and the New Testaments, Jesus should be the one to have been mentioned deliberately to have been 'tempted' in this way by the Devil— although each and every Prophet must have had his share of 'temptations' from the Shayateen of humans and Jinns as Quran testifies:

In this way have We appointed to every Prophet an enemy from devils among men and jinns – inspiring to each other gilded speech as a delusion...

(Quran 6: 112) (see also 25: 31)

If the incident of 'temptation' stands out in the *New Testament*, in the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, it must have had a purpose; a purpose meant to show something other than its being a mere peculiarity with Jesus, peace be upon him.

If New Testament reference to the temptation is peculiar, then equally unusual is the Quranic reference to Annah's prayer for protecting Maryam and her progeny from devil the accursed.

**..and I seek protection with You for her
and her progeny against Shaitaan, the
accursed.**

(Quran 3: 36)

Putting two and two together, we reach closer to the moral of the incident: all prophets must be

tempted, and all of them must overcome the satanic tendencies and influences. But there is a danger of succumbing to the influence of the devil in a weaker moment: Adam, for example, gave in at the moment of temptation; Jonah showed his weakness in abandoning the mission he had been entrusted with. Jesus, on the other hand, is one of the Firmly Persevering, the Determined, the Resolute [oolul-'azm] Prophets – one in line with Prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all.

Some of the Prophets, in spite of their best efforts, showed weakness in their times of trial showing lack of determination or resolution [oolul-'azm] Prophets Adam and Jonah, peace be upon them both, are two obvious examples to be cited:

Adam showed his weakness when he yielded to the Shaitan's temptation:

And indeed We made a covenant with Adam in old times, but he forgot; and We found no determination [oolul-'azm] in him.

(Quran 20:115)

Jonah, or Yunus (also known as Dhun-Noon and Sahibil Hooti, because of his relationship with the big fish, the Companion of the Fish) was another Prophet who succumbed to his own frustration, anger, or despair, lacking that brilliant quality of determination [oolul-'azm]. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is being warned, twice, not to lose

patience like Jonah:

Then have patience (Oh Muhammad) for your Lord's decree, and be not like the Companion of the Fish (Sahibil Hooti; Jonah); Remember when he called Me (God), and he was in despair.

Had it not been that favour from his Lord had (already) reached him, he surely had been cast into the wilderness while he was blameworthy.

But his Lord chose him and placed him among the righteous.

(Quran 68: 48-50)

Then have patience (Oh Muhammad) even as the people of determination, (the most resolute, the persevering ones), [oolul-'azm] from among the messengers (of old) had patience...

(Quran 46:35)

This helps us understand the fact that God helped Jesus, peace be upon him, come out of the temptations of the devil brilliantly proving to us that he was one of the Determined, Resolute [oolul-'azm] prophets of God.

This reminds us further of the tradition of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, which says: Satan the accursed pokes every child at the time of its birth, except Maryam and her son, Jesus, peace be

upon them both, as the wife of 'Imran (Annah) had prayed for their protection against Satan.

Moreover, the Devil had to leave Jesus, peace be upon him, alone because he has no authority over the bondmen of Allah:

Allah said (to Iblees, the Devil) "Indeed as for my bondmen, no authority shalt thou have over them; Except over the erring ones who follow thee."

(Quran, 15: 42)

23. Fasts of the Hypocrites And the Pious

In his famous 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus told people he had come not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them. In this very powerful sermon, he showed the crowd he was there to instill new life in the old law.

The old commandments regarding killing, adultery, divorce, swearing, revengeful law, loving neighbours etc. still stood; but Jesus, peace be upon him, struck at the hypocrisy involved in interpreting and executing those commandments. He could see through pretensions and affectations passing in the name of piety. He showed his followers how appearance and reality – piety and pretension – were not the same. He showed them that giving alms, praying, and fasting for people to see was against the spirit of charity and piety.

Echoing the feelings of the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, and Zachariah regarding spiritless,

hypocritical fasts unacceptable to God, Jesus provided down-to-earth practical suggestions to his followers:

And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

(That is, they wanted people to see that they were fasting; and people have seen it; that is their reward. They were not expecting any reward from God; neither do they get any.)

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

(Matthew, 6: 16-18)

24. Prophets Shall Be Rejected Despite Fasts

Jesus shows his disciples how message of truth would be rebuffed by the rejectors whether the Messenger approaches them fasting or eating.

"For John came neither eating (bread) nor drinking (wine), and they say, "He has a demon."

(i.e. They wouldn't listen to one who wasn't

eating like them, the 'normal' people.)

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"

(i.e. How can a person be a Prophet if he eats and drinks like others!)

Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds (children)'. (Matthew 11:16-19; Luke 7:31-35.)

(i.e. Does my message sound like the message of a man with a demon, or the message of a drunkard! Look at my deeds, and look at the character of my followers!)

This is the kind of situation David, peace be upon him, complained about when even his fasts had become a reason for reproach; and that is exactly the situation encountered by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him when, his opponents said mockingly:

What is wrong with this messenger of Allah' that he eats food and walks in market-places? Why is not an angel sent down to him, to be a warner with him!

(Quran 25: 7)

13. Fasts of the Self-Righteous and the God-Fearing

Self-righteousness is a danger for piety. Jesus told this parable to some 'who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,

'God I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.'

The Pharisee attributes his steadfastness to himself and that makes him supercilious.

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.'

Jesus, peace be upon him, said,

"I tell you, this man (i.e. the tax collector) went down to his house justified

(i.e. with his sins forgiven)

rather than the other

(i.e. the Pharisee, the religious man);

for every one who exalts himself
will be humbled, but he who humbles
himself will be exalted."

(Luke 18: 12-14.)

26. Wedding Guests Don't Fast

(Putting together the three versions of the story of Matthew, Mark, and Luke we have the 'Wedding Guests' parable in the following words:

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the (disciples of) Pharisees fast (often and offer prayers), but your disciples do not fast ('but yours eat and drink')?"

And Jesus said to them,

"Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? (As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they can not fast.) The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast (in that day).

Jesus, peace be upon him, goes on to give them two parables in support of his stand: the parable of the new patch on old garment, and the parable of the new wine in old wineskins, suggesting advent of a new era. (Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2.18-22; Luke 5.33-39)

27. Driving out Devils by Fasting And Prayer

After the transfiguration incident, Mark (9:14-29), Matthew (17:14-20), and Luke (9:37-43) describe the incident of the boy, who was his parents' only child and had been seized by a devil, crying out, convulsing, foaming, shattering him, throwing him in fire, water, and making his life miserable. The disciples tried to drive the devil out, but they failed. The father of the child approached Jesus, peace be upon him, asking him to help 'if you can do anything.' Jesus wondered at the 'If you can!' expression of the father and told him:

"All things are possible to him who believes."

Immediately the father of the child cried out,

"I believe; help my unbelief!"

(Mark 9:22-25)

Jesus, peace be upon him, rebuked his disciples for being 'faithless and perverse' (Matthew: 17:20; Luke:9:41), and he rebuked the spirit to come out of the boy, which it did.

Later on Jesus was asked by his disciples how he could drive the devil out when they had failed. Jesus, peace be upon him, gives them two reasons: lack of their own faith, and the need of prayer and fasting:

Because of your little faith; For truly, I say

to you if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you!

The Revised Standard version points out that Verse about fasting had been dropped by later scribes. The footnotes read: 'Other ancient authorities insert verse 21' (in Matthew, and the word 'and fasting' in Mark 9:29) which reads:

But this kind never comes out except for prayer and fasting."

(Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29)

One prays to Allah, a higher authority, for oneself, a weak creature, one doesn't pray to oneself. That should make it clear who Jesus was praying to.

As a matter of fact, these Devils have no authority over people who have faith in the Supremacy and Sovereignty of God:

Indeed he (the Devil) has no power over those who believe and (those who) put trust in their Lord,

(Quran 16: 99)

He (the devil) has authority over only those who befriend him, and those who ascribe partners (to God).

(Quran, 16: 100)

28. Apostles of Jesus Fast

The 'Wedding-Guests' parables do not suggest that Jesus, peace be upon him, and his disciples did not fast. There is evidence that his disciples used to fast also after his 'ascension'.

"Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon.. Lucius.. Man'aen.. and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off (..to Seleucia.. and Cyprus)

(Acts: 13: 1-4)

Paul and Barnabas preached at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. 'And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.' (Acts: 14: 22-23)

29. Christian Fasts As Practiced Through Centuries

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Christianity has observed a 40-day fast period during Lent, a spring period of penitence, and during Advent, a penitential period before Christmas.

Earlier Church began fasts 6 weeks before Easter; Sundays being non-fasting days, it left them with 36 days of fasts. In the 7th century, 4 days

were added before the first Sunday in Lent to establish 40 fasting days, in imitation of Jesus Christ's fast in the wilderness.

It was a time of preparation of candidates for Baptism and a time of penance for sinners. Penitents in Rome began their period of public penance on the first day of Lent. They were sprinkled with ashes, dressed in sackcloth, and obliged to remain apart until they were reconciled with the Christian community on Maundy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter.

These practices fell into disuse about 8th-10th century. In the early centuries fasting rules were strict, as they still are in Eastern Church. In the West, the rules have gradually been relaxed. The strict law of fasting among Roman Catholics was dispensed during World War II.

Among Roman Catholics the observance has been modified further since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) to allow greater individual choice, with mandatory fasting only on Ash Wednesday (first day of Lent, six and a half weeks before Easter, between February 4 and March 11), and Good Friday (the day Jesus, peace be upon him, is supposed to have been crucified.)

Protestant churches generally leave the question of fasting to the consciences of individual church members, although in the Anglican Churches, *The Book of Common Prayer* prescribes that Lent be observed with fasting.



FASTS AS ORDAINED TO MUSLIMS

30. Fasting from Before Wahy



Before his call to Prophethood, Muhammad, peace be upon him, used to retire to cave 'Hira' in the Mountain of Noor, usually in the month of Ramadhan, the month of heat. There he used to pray and fast according to the ways of the People of the Book, that is Jews and Christians. After his call, he, peace be upon him, and his companions, used to fast on days of Ashora (10th of Muharram, which probably coincided with the tenth of Tishri ordained to be a day of fasting to Moses, peace be upon him.) In addition to the three days of Luminous nights, (layyamil beedh), the Prophet, peace be upon him, is also known to have observed fasts for some days in the Sacred months (Shuhoorul-Haram: Dhi-Qa'ad, Dhi-Hajj, and Muharram in succession, and Rajab, the seventh month.) However, none of these days was mandatory upon all followers to fast; so whoever wished to fast, did so.

31. The Ordainment of Fasting (keeping in view human limitations)

This practice of fasting continued until the 17th month after Hijrah, on the day of the Ghazwah (expedition and battle) of Badr, to be precise, when the fasting of the month of Ramadhan was ordained, making it obligatory for all adult Muslims, male as well as female, to fast.

The purpose of this fast was described as acquisition of 'taqwa'. Roughly translated it would mean 'piety that comes out of the fear of God which would help one ward off evil'.

Oh you who believe, Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become god-fearing.

(Quran 2:183)

But this fasting was not supposed to be for an indefinite period. It was for

a certain number of days..
(Quran 2:184)

The number of days is to vary between 29 and 30, depending upon the sighting of the moon for the months of Ramadhan and Shawwal.

Furthermore, as all adults would not be able to fast during this month for various reasons, excep-

tions were detailed right at the outset, covering the cases of old age, sickness, and travels:

Then whoever is sick among you or is on journey, Then let him complete the number in other days..

(Quran 2:184)

Fasting would be far more efficacious if it were to be accompanied by charity. Moreover, there would be people in the community (terminally old and terminally sick) who would not be able to complete the number of days' in fasting; therefore, charity was prescribed in the form of *fidyah*, in a sort of redemption, expiation, in compensation of fasting.

In the earlier days of the prescription of fasting whoever wished to fast, he fasted; and those who did not want to fast or could not fast, fed one poor person for every fast he or she missed. However, this form of *fidyah*, compensation was not prescribed without an exception: it was 'for those who could afford it':

and for those who can afford it there is an expiation [fidyah]: the feeding of a man in need..

(Quran 2: 184)

Feeding one person was enough to serve the purpose of expiation; however, if someone could afford to do more than that it would be better for him, too:

But whoever does (more of this) good of his own accord, Then it is better for him.

(Quran 2:184)

Later on the concept of feeding the poor in the month of Ramadhan remained as a form of charity, but its application in lieu of fasting was restricted in the cases of the terminally old and the terminally sick; other believers were required to complete their days later on if they missed any fast because of temporary sickness or travels. The young and the healthy who were stationed at homes would have no excuse not to continue fasting in the month of Ramadhan. Since they were required to complete the number of fasts anyway, fasting in days other than in Ramadhan would not be as sanguine, effortless, and facile. For such fasting persons it would not be obligatory to pay this *fidyah*. However, voluntary charity would still remain an optional good deed to be rewarded amply by Allah.

These exceptions were granted in order to make it easy for people to follow the religious duties.

Allah desires ease for you; He does not desire hardship for you

(Quran 2:185)

The purpose of these fasts and accompanying good deeds of charity and prayers is to express gratitude for all God's blessings in terms of the

Guidance He has provided through His Prophet in the form of His Book, called 'Quran', The Reading. The month of Fasting provides Muslims an opportunity to Magnify Allah (by remembrance and praise, by *Tamjeed*, *tasbeeh* and *takbeer*) for guiding them to the right path – with the hope that they would prove to be grateful:

and for the reason that you should magnify Allah for having guided you;

and for the reason that you may be thankful.

(Quran 2:185)

32. Why Fasting is Ordained in the Month of Ramadhan?

The word *Ramadhan* is derived from 'ra-ma-dh-' which means parchedness or scorchedness (the process of burning of the outer skin due to excessive heat.) Among the Arabs, there was a tradition of fasting during this hottest month – which used to be calculated by a peculiar method of combining lunar months with solar year. As Islam uses only the lunar year, this ninth month in the Islamic calendar goes round all four seasons.

On the other hand, what is the ninth month in the modern Gregorian solar Calendar, September, was really the seventh, as the name itself suggests. Jews celebrated their Youme Kipur in this ninth or seventh month.

The Jewish and Christian traditions of forty

days of fasting were related with the communication of the two Prophets (Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them both) with God on mount Sinai and the wilderness in the desert where each one 'fasted' for forty days.

According to Islamic traditions reported by a number of the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him¹ it is claimed that Prophets Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and David, peace be upon them all, received their first missions in the month of what Arabs call Ramadhan, as did Muhammad, peace be upon him. These 'reports' [riwaayaah] say Abraham's Scriptures were sent down on the first of the month of Ramadhan; the *Torah* was sent down on the sixth of Ramadhan; and the Gospel (of Jesus, *Injeel*) was sent down on the 13th of Ramadhan; *Zaboor* (the Psalms of David) were sent down on the 18th of Ramadhan...

According to some reports, the Quran was sent down on the 24th of Ramadhan; other reports suggest that it was sent down on the 17th of Ramadhan; still other reports suggest the date to be

¹ (1) Waathilah (t) Bin Al-Asqa 'a' s report has been quoted by Abul Fadh'l Rasheedu-Deen Al-Maibudi in His '*Kashaful Israar wa Uddatil-Abraar*': published by Mouasasah Inteshaaraat Ameer Kabeer, Tehraan, 1361 (Hijri Shamsi), Volume 1 page 490. Al-Maibudi, an illustrious disciple of the renowned mystic and poet Khawaja Abdullah Ansari and a follower of Imam Shafae, completed his work in the year 520 of Hijra. (2) Imaam Ismaeel Imaduddin Ibn Katheer (died 774 Hijrah) in his Tafseerul Quranul Kareem quotes a similar Hadeeth from Musnad Ahmad.

the 27th of Ramadhan – adding to the confusion of the uninitiated reader. Some scholars who are well-versed at contexts of these reports suggest that these three different dates mentioned in various reports, in fact, point to three different incidents involved with the history of revelation of the Quran: the Quran in its entirety was sent down on the 'sky of the earth' on the night of one of these three dates, from where it took the next 23 years to be revealed bit by bit, piece by piece, Ayah by Ayah, Surah by Surah, according to the need.

One of the remaining two dates refers to the first revelation to the Messenger of God, peace be upon him; and the third date refers to the incident when 'Fasting' was ordained.

One of these magnificent nights is the *Night of the Power* [Lailatul- Qadr]. *The Night of Power* is variable and indefinite, so that the believer may try his best in remembrance of God during all of the nights expected to be nights of power: any odd night in the third tenth. This process of hiding the night of power like hiding the great name [Isme a'adham], and the meaning of Salaatal-wusta allows believers to seek more fervently and reap the best of the harvests in reward.

One of the reasons why these fasts have been assigned in the month of Ramadhan is to express gratitude to Allah for having sent down Quran in that month – the fasting month is therefore the month of celebration and joy in Islamic tradition and practice – culminating into the celebration of Eidul-Fitr on the first of Shawwal.

The month of Ramadhan is the month in which was revealed the Quran, Guidance for mankind, and the Criterion (of right and wrong);

(Quran 2: 185)

So whoever of you witnesses this month, then let him fast it..

(Quran 2:185)

At first the fast was considered to be from the time of sleeping, after 'Isha prayers, to the sunset', just as in Jewish and Christian traditions. But people were reported to have fainted in long hot days because of hunger and thirst. It was also hard on married people to go without satisfying their natural desires for an entire month. Some came back repenting that they woke up to eat at night or went to bed with their wives. Islam was meant to be a religion of nature which was not going to prescribe and dictate rules which would be difficult for the believers to carry out. So going to wives at night, and eating up to dawn were permitted. These concessions were considered to be blessings of Allah, especially for this Ummah.

It is made lawful for you to go unto your wives on the night of the fast; they are your covering-garment (i.e. against nakedness of sexual desires) and you are their covering-garment;

(Quran 2: 187)

Allah is aware that you have been deceiving yourselves in this respect; So He has relented (turned in mercy) toward you, and He has forgiven you (relieving you of your hardship);

(Quran 2: 187)

So now hold intercourse with them and seek that which Allah has ordained for you

(Quran 2: 187)

(i.e. Mawwadah wa rahmah, love, compassion and family life)

And eat and drink until the white thread (i.e. the whiteness of morning) becomes distinct from the black thread (i.e. the darkness of dawn) Then strictly observe the fast until nightfall;

And touch them (i.e. spouses) not while you are busy in 't'ikaaf' in mosques;

These are the Limitations (set for you) by Allah - So approach them not;

Thus Allah expounds His revelations to mankind So that they may become God-fearing (warding off evil).

(Quran 2:187)

Had these concessions not been made, Islamic fast would also have become obsolete and impractical like the fasts of Jews and Christians.

33. Fasting Goes Well With Worship and Prayers:

Sitting in the midst of the verses of fasting 183-185 on the one hand and ayah 187 on the other is verse 186 prompting believers to call God (in prayers.) Prayers go well with fasting. Fasts are observed for the pleasure of Allah. When a believer strives to please Allah, he wants to call Him, address Him, asking for His favours in terms of the best of this world and the best of the hereafter – whatever he can think of, or whatever God teaches him to pray for.

Why would a person want to fast and struggle to please God if he had no favours to ask of God? Only God is Ghani, Self-Sufficient, One Who does not need anyone's help or favour. Human beings need His help. This verse prompting the bondman to call God is one of the most beautiful and hopeful verses of the Quran assuring God's response to the bondman's call:

And when my bondmen ask you (O prophet) about Me; Then (tell them) I am surely nearby; I answer the prayer of the suppliant When he cries to Me;

So let them hear My call (commandments), and let them trust in Me; in order that they

may be rightly guided.

(Quran: 2:186)

34. THREE KINDS OF FASTS IN ISLAM

Muslims observe three kinds of fasts:

1. *Obligatory Fasts in Ramadhan*

The most well-known kind of fasts to outsiders is the fasting in the month of Ramadhan, which is the kind ordained for all adult sane members. These fasts were prescribed in the 17th month of the Prophet's Hijrah to Madinah. They are observed purely for the pleasure of God, seeking physical and spiritual cleanliness, leading to piety and perseverance, and expressing gratitude to Allah for sending down in this month the Qura'an which, according to Muslims, is a source of guidance for mankind. These fasts allude to no personal or communal guilt and its atonement, they remind Muslims of no historical wickedness and its penitence, neither do they refer to any communal calamity and its mourning. For Muslims these fasts are 'seasons of gladness and joy, and cheerful feasts' exhorting Muslims to 'love truth and peace,' in words of the earlier Zachariah, peace be upon him.

(Zachariah: 8:19)

2. *Prescribed Fasts For Atonement*

Besides these obligatory fasts of Ramadhan, there

are four non-obligatory prescribed fasts of penance and expiation a person may observe at any time of the year other than Ramadhan and the two days of the two Eids - if and when the occasion dictates.

a. Fasts to Atone a Homicide

A person who has killed someone unintentionally expiates by freeing a slave or by fasting for a period of two months (4:92). This will be in addition to whatever legal punishment he may receive.

It is not for a believer to kill another believer unless it be by mistake. He who has killed a believer by mistake must set free a believing slave, and pay the blood-money to the family of the slain, unless they remit it as a charity... And whoever cannot find (means with which to do this) must fast two consecutive months. (This is) a penance from Allah. And Allah is Knower, Wise.

(Quran 4:92)

b. Fasts to Atone for Dhahaar

A person who has called his wife 'the back of his mother' (pronouncing a form of divorce during the pre-Islamic days) was required to free a slave or fast for two months as penance before returning to his wife:

Those who put away their wives (by saying they are their mothers) and afterwards would go back on that which they have

said, then freeing a slave is a must before they touch one another...

And he who finds not anything to do this with, then there is (the penalty) of feeding sixty poor persons; This (warning is) for the purpose that you may trust in Allah and His Messenger; Such are the limits (imposed by) Allah; and for disbelievers (there) is a painful doom.

(Quran 58: 3-4)

c. Fasts to Atone Broken Oaths

A person who has failed to keep an oath is required to feed ten poor persons or free a slave or fast for three days as penance:

Allah will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths, but He will take you to task for the oaths which you swear in earnest.

The expiation of such (broken oaths) is the feeding of ten of the needy with the average of that with which you feed your own family, or the clothing of them;

or the liberation of a slave, and for him who does not find the means to do (any of these), then a three days' fast.

This is the expiation of your oaths. Thus Allah expounds to you His revelations in

order that you may give thanks.

(Quran 5:89)

d. Fasts In Lieu of Sacrifice during Hajj Tamattu'

A person who is unable to provide an animal for sacrifice during the Tamattu' Hajj is required to fast for ten days in expiation.

- i. Shaving off head before the offering reaches its destination:

And fulfil the Hajj and 'Umra; And if you get besieged, send whatever offering you can afford; and shave not your heads until the offering has reached its destination; Then whoever of you is ill or has hurt in his head, for him is an expiation by Fasting or by alms or a rite.

(Quran 2: 196)

- ii. Fast in lieu of Sacrifice in Tamattu'

(Combining Hajj with 'Umrah)

Then when you are secure, Whoever combines 'Umrah with Hajj (for him is) whatever sacrifice is easy for him (to offer); And whoever can't afford (the sacrifice), then a fast of three days; during the hajj and of seven when you return (home); These are ten days complete...

(Quran 2:196.)

**3. Optional Fasts According to Sunnah
(the Practice of the prophet, peace be upon him)**

Pious Muslims insist on keeping the fasts the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have observed before and after the fasts of Ramadhan were made compulsory. These fasts include those of Thursdays and Mondays, fasts of Ayyamil-beedh (the days corresponding with the luminous full-moon nights of 13, 14, and 15 of the lunar month), fasts of Tasoo'aa and Ashora (9th and 10th) in Muharram, Arafah (9th) in Hajj, six days of Shawwal, unspecified number of days in the month of Sha'abaa, the sacred months *Dhi-Qa'ad*, *Dhi-Haj*, *Muharram*, and *Rajab*), or one or three days in every month of the calendar.

These non-essential fasts could be observed for the purpose of merely seeking the pleasure of Allah, or while praying for some favour, or asking for God's help in averting a calamity, sickness or war. Such fasts could be observed on any days except for the days of two Eid-festivals.

35. ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF ACCEPTABLE FASTS

All kinds of Muslim Fasts involve not only abstaining from permissible and lawful things like food, drink, and legitimate sex, but a willingness to abstain from everything that is illegal and prohibited, disciplining body, heart, mind, and other limbs to be led on the right path:

Do not stand firmly on that about which you have no knowledge: Indeed the hearing, and the sight, and the heart Each of them shall be questioned

(*Quran 17:36*)

Fast also requires the fast of ears so one who fasts does not hear anything unbecoming or false. What is unlawful to speak is also unlawful to hear. That is why God almighty equates the eavesdropper with the profiteer, in His words,

(Exalted is He: Listeners to falsehood, consumers of illicit gains.)

(*Quran 5:42*)

A fast is the fast of eyes so they do not see anything evil or prohibited:

Said the Prophet Muhammad, on him be peace, "A furtive glance is one of the poisoned arrows of Satan, on him be God's curse. Whoever forsakes it for fear of God will receive from Him, Great and Glorious is He, a faith the sweetness of which he will find within his heart."

Fast also means the fast of heart so it does not feel and harbour anything improper. It should look to God with fear and hope. Furthermore, Fast requires a charitable and God-fearing heart which delights in giving away generously in the way of Allah, taking care of the needy, the orphan, the widow, the poor among neighbours and among relatives, the wayfarers. Above all, the fast requires a

heart that exults in remembering God in prayers. Anything short of this is merely starvation – and Allah doesn't care a bit if people want to keep themselves hungry and thirsty for their own pleasure.

Fast also requires the fast of mind so it does not think any evil thoughts.

On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet testify against them as to what they used to do,

On that day will Allah pay them their just due, and they will know that Allah, He is the Manifest Truth.

(*Quran 24: 24-25*)

Surely there has come unto you [basaa'ir] visible-sights (enlightenment, proofs) from your Lord, Whosoever shall then see, shall do so for his own soul; And whosoever blinds himself, will do so to his own hurt; And I am not over you an overseer (a keeper, hafeedh.)

(*Quran 6:105*)

Fast also requires the fast of tongue so one who fasts does not speak anything indecent and unlawful: lying, backbiting, scandal-mongering, perjury and a lustful gaze are the five things that Jabir reports from the Messenger, peace be upon him, to be responsible for breaking (destroying) the fast.

Fast also requires the fast of feet so they do not take one to any evil places; and it is also the fast of **hands** so they do not perform any evil deeds.

As regards eating and drinking after the fast is broken, the fast of the **stomach** requires that it does not devour ill-gotten food and drink, and it should not devour what Allah has made 'haram'. Why should a man hunger and thirst for the whole day abstaining himself the whole day from something Allah has made 'lawful' or Halal for him, only to break it with something that Allah has made haram, prohibited for him?

Indeed those who hide anything of the scriptures which Allah has revealed (regarding the Permitted and the Prohibited) They eat in their bellies nothing but fire: Allah will not speak to them on the day of Resurrection, Nor will He purify them; Theirs will be painful doom.

(Quran 2:174)

Indeed those who devour the wealth of orphans wrongfully, they do but swallow fire into their bellies; and they will be exposed to burning flame.

(Quran 4:10)

Indeed the tree of Zaqqoom! Indeed the Food of the sinners Like molten brass

it seethes in their bellies; As the seething of boiling water: (And it will be said): Take him and drag him to the centre of hell.

(Quran 44:45-47)

One who fasts should not indulge in eating too much at the time of breaking the fast, Iftaar, to make up for the loss during the fast. What a person eats should be **Halal** and **Tayyab**, lawful, pure, and clean, and should be consumed with **moderation**.

Although sackcloth and ashes would continue to be a part of Jewish and Christian fasts until the whole institution of fasting went out of fashion, Muslims would be the first community heeding to the teachings of Jesus and other earlier prophets – in letter and in spirit. In Islam, fasts shall no more be accompanied by dismal looks enforced by sack-clothes and ashes. Muslims shall not give up their daily work only because they were fasting. Muslims would recognise these commands worth receiving through a Prophet of God, Muhammad, peace be upon him. Muslims have been doing exactly what Jesus and the earlier Prophets had been preaching, the source of the message being the same.

36. TEN PRACTICAL RULES REGARDING FASTS

There are ten rules that need to be followed while observing the Ordained fasts during the month of Ramadhan: five of these rules are Obligatory (*[faradh]*, prescribed by God), and five of them are

Traditional *[sunnah]*, following the practice of the Prophet, peace be upon him.)

(a) The Five Obligatory Rules:

1. **Seeking Ramadhan is obligatory:** It is Obligatory to seek Ramadhan to find out the beginning and the end of the month of fasts, to see if the fasts would be 29 or 30. For this purpose, the sighting of the first of the moon by one adult Muslim is enough for a community. In order to end the month of fasting, the moon of the first of Shawwal has to be reported to have been sighted by two adult Muslims.

2. **Expression of Intention is Obligatory:** Every night before the end of Sahoor, intention of fasting needs to be expressed in words, without which, according to the Shaafites, the fast is not complete. The words to express intention could be in any language, but their meaning should be similar to this:

Nawaytu Sawma ghadan 'an adaain fardhi
Ramadhaana (haadhi-hi-s-sinati) 'li-llahi
ta'aalaa

'I intend to fast for (the entire duration of the day following this night) (by way of performing) timely the Obligatory Fast of the month of Ramadhan (of this year) for Allah Ta'aala.

It is also important to express the intention of breaking one's fast at the sunset. Again the intention can be expressed in any language so long as he says something similar to what our prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us to say, and that is:

Allahumma laka Sumtu wa bika amantu
wa 'alaika tawak-kaltu wa 'ala rizqika
aftartu

**Oh Our God For You did I fast and in You
did I believe and on You did I trust and
with Your provision I am breaking my fast**

3. **External thing must not enter the interior** [baaTin]: BaaTin includes the brain, stomach, or bladder, and veins; except when it is unintentional.
4. **Sexual activity of any kind is prohibited,**
5. **Intentional vomiting is prohibited.**

(b) The Five Traditional Rules

1. *Delaying Sahoor, the end of eating time in the morning;*
2. *Hastening in breaking the fast [iftaar];*
3. *Breaking the fast with dates or water;*
4. *Ceasing to brush teeth or gurgle from the afternoon to sunset.*

5. **Exceeding in good deeds:** which includes giving charity [sadaqah], reading of Quraan, sitting in the Mosque in I'tikaaf, and performing sunnat prayers [taraveeh], which is about 20 rak'at every night.

37. The Magnanimity of Ramadhan

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have told his followers that `Allah, Subahanahu wa Ta'ala says, `Fasting is for me!'

That is because other worships are seen by other human beings when they are being carried out, but only that individual and his God know exactly if a person is fasting or not.

The Messenger of Allah is reported to have said, Allah says, "He (the believer) leaves his desires and his food and drink for My sake. Fasting is for Me and I reward it. Every good action is rewarded by ten times its kind, up to seven hundred times, except fasting, which is for Me, and I reward it."

Messenger of God, peace be upon him, is also reported to have said that `Fast is a shield of protection for you, so when you are fasting, don't behave obscenely or foolishly, and if anyone argues with you or abuses you, say, `I am fasting, I am fasting.'"

In one of the sermons towards the end of Sha'abaa, the Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have said:

Oh mankind, upon you is about to arrive a magnificent month [shahrul 'adheem], a month the

beginning of which is mercy [shahrul awwaluhu rahmatun], and the middle of which is forgiveness [wa awsaTuhu maghfiratun], and the last part of it is protection against fire [wa aakhiruhu 'atiqu min-naar].

(This is) a month in which there is a night which is better (in worship) than one thousand months. In nearness to God, in it a good deed out of considerate habit is better than an obligatory deed in other months; and performing of an obligatory deed in this night is better than performing seventy obligatory deeds in other nights.

And (the Prophet, peace be upon him said) this month is the month of Patience and Perseverance [wa huwa shahrul-Sabr]. And the reward of Sabr is Jannah. And this is a month of equity and equality; and this is a month in which the provision of the believer is increased. Whoever breaks his fast after fasting, his sins are forgiven for him; and the reward for him is such that it is awarded to him without any reductions or cutbacks.

People in the audience said, "Oh Messenger of God, not all of us can find that with which to give a fasting person to break his fast?"

He, peace be upon him, said, " Allah will award you for that also. Whoever provides a fasting person for breaking his fast with a sip of milk, a date, or a drink of water; and whoever satiates a fasting person, Allah will have him drink from the Hawdhi a drink after which he will never be thirsty until he enters Jannah. And whoever lightens (the work-load) of his slave or servant [mamlook], Allah

will forgive his sons and protect him against the fire of hell.

Therefore (went on the Prophet, peace be upon him) increase in it four practising habits: two of them are such that they will endear you to your Lord [khaslatain tardhawna bi-humaa rabbukum], and two of them are such that you should never be independent [ghani] (oblivious, unobservant, unaware) of them [wa khaslatain laa ghanee bikum 'an-humaa]:

The two practices which are going to endear you to your Lord are:

1. the witness that There is no god except God [shahaadat an Lai-llaha illalah];
2. asking for forgiveness [astaghfaar].

And the two habitual practices of which you should never be forgetful are:

1. Asking Allah for Jannah,
2. Asking for protection against the fire (of hell)



FASTS AS ORDAINED BEFORE YOU

(THE TRADITION OF FASTS ACCORDING TO THE
JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM SCRIPTURES)

MUHAMMAD UMAR CHAND

FASTS AS ORDAINED BEFORE YOU



II Societies, From the most primitive to the most advanced, have found **fasting** useful for one reason or another. The people of the Book - Jews, Christians and Muslims have emphasized **fasting** during certain periods seeking atonement or penance and expressing feelings of mourning or festivity. Even other religious people of Jains, Buddhists and Hindus have practiced **fasting** for their spiritual growth, salvation or atonement.

Non - religious advanced people of high - tech cultures have also found this institution useful for dietary and political purposes.

Apart from the above, Muslim tradition also tells us that all prophets - Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (Peace be upon them) have had this institution of **fasting**.

The author suggests that instead of making this world a hot - bed of confrontation, we need to realize that the Source of Guidance for Jews, Christians and Muslims has been the same : the more we deviate from the Source, the more problems we would have at our hands.

Further, with his deep knowledge on **fasting** the author describe in detail the excellent qualities of **fasting** and the success achieved and enjoyed by the religious people, on account of it.

*'Oh you who believe, **fasting** is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for people before you so that you may become God-fearing !'*

ISBN: 967 - 9963 - 62 - 4

(Quran 2 : 183)